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THE
LOVE OF COUNTRY,

A
DISCOURSE

PREACHED IN ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH,
NIAGARA,

ON TUESDAY, THE 6TH FEBRUARY, 1836,

(A DAY APPOINTED FOR PUBLIC THANKSGIVING, ON ACCOUNT OF OUR
DELIVERANCE FROM THE MISERIES OF THE LATE INSURRECTION.)

BY THE

REVEREND ROBERT MACGILL.

NIAGARA.

BY THOMAS SEWELL.

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NIAGARA, 8th February, 1838.

REVEREND SIR,

Participating cordially in the patriotic sentiments, so eloquently expressed in the Sermon delivered by you on Tuesday, the 6th instant, and sincerely convinced that a more general promulgation of such sentiments, in these times of peril and alarm, would have a tendency to promote the cause of peace, and perpetuate, in our possession, the invaluable blessings conferred on us by the British Constitution, we respectfully request you to favor us with a copy of the Sermon alluded to for publication.

We remain,

Reverend Sir,

Your obedient servants,

[Signed by twenty-four Members of the Congregation of St.
Andrew's Church.]

R E P L Y :

GENTLEMEN,

Although your well known sympathy with the sentiments expressed in my Sermon on Tuesday last, affords me very sincere pleasure, yet I confess that it is not without some misgivings that I accede to your request for its publication. I had not received any information of the appointment of a day of thanksgiving by the Lieutenant Governor, until, by accident, I lighted on the proclamation on the previous Friday, when the duties of the coming Sabbath demanded my immediate attention. Nor could I find leisure on the Monday for preparation except a few hours in the evening. Yet, under all these disadvantages, I

will not conceal my conviction, that should the printed discourse carry along with it, in those who may favor it with a perusal, all my own deep feelings of the weighty truths it contains, the too evident haste of its composition will perhaps be less regarded, and as a voiceless visitor it may serve to correct some serious errors into which many have fallen, and warm them with an enlightened love to country—the soul and life of all patriotic virtue.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your most affectionate

And very obedient servant,

ROBERT MACGILL.

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Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.—
Psalms CXXVII.

We every where find in the writings of inspired men a constant acknowledgement of the providence of God, as exerting its watchful care, not only over individuals, but nations. To its gracious dispensation the pious and good have always attributed the peculiar blessings of their own condition, the prosperity of kingdoms, the security of empire and the fate of battles. And surely it is consistent with all that reason can discover, and all that revelation teaches of the character and agency of God, that he continues to watch with paternal care over the creatures whom he has so graciously distinguished by his choicest gifts—reason and immortality; for whom he sent his Son to suffer and to die; from among whom he is selecting a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, to celebrate his glory in time, and to be unutterably blessed in his presence through-

out eternity. How conformable to reason and the sacred scriptures, that such beings, in all their interests and connections, should be the objects of God's providential care !

To fix your attention on this consolatory doctrine, consider that the whole fabric of human society has been ordained and regulated by divine wisdom, and is consequently a legitimate object of divine superintendence and government. The Creator, who knew that it was not good for man to be alone, has implanted in every bosom the social principle ; and its influence is felt throughout every period and in every condition of our existence. This powerful and universal principle is among mankind what attraction is in the material world. It conjoins them into the intimacies of neighborhood, the associations of friendship, and the ties of love ; and out of it arises the fabric of society, based upon the family relation, and rising up into communities, provinces, states, empires—the largest family division among the inhabitants of the world ;—and over all the Lord God omnipotent reigneth as the Governor among the nations.

Wherever God reigns he reigns by established and equitable laws ; wherever he has prescribed duty, he has ordained a rule of duty. If he has rendered us accountable to his own tribunal for our private, personal and relative conduct, he has also made known to us the rule by which we shall be judged ; and it ought to be our chief concern to ascertain what the Lord our God requires of us in these several relations. On this day set apart by our chief provincial Magistrate for solemn thanksgiving to Almighty God for his gracious deliverance from the miseries of conspiracy and rebellion, it may not be inappropriate for us to consider one of the principal affec-

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tions of a christian citizen, viz : the love he owes his country, that a brief consideration of this affection may prepare us for a few observations on the peculiar evils by which we have been threatened, and the gracious providence of God by which they have been averted from us.

The christian citizen should love his country because *it is his*. God has created us with a tendency to form particular and local attachments. We love the homestead of our fathers, "where our young footsteps in infancy wandered ;" we love the village where we enjoyed our earliest friendships ; we cherish a particular regard to the county or district in which it lies ; and this regard extends itself to the whole realm of which our native village may form only a very insignificant part. We are conscious to ourselves that we indulge such preferences, and we feel that they are among the most agreeable of our sentiments. It is a matter wholly unimportant to us that men of other countries describe ours as sterile in its soil, or changeable in its climate, or rude in its speech and the manners of its people. We may in part, perhaps, admit the truth of the foreigner's description, and yet after all, the heart's feeling may be—I love my own sterile land better than any other in the world, however luxuriant its fields or sunny its sky. How strong and deep are those local attachments in the millions of every land whom it would be impossible to allure from their native soil by any promises of gain that might be held out to them in distant climes ;—who prefer to live and die within their native valleys, humble and obscure, rather than pursue the most flattering dreams of fortune upon a foreign shore ! How pathetically have we witnessed the strength of these local attachments exhibited in many of our

own countrymen whom a stern necessity compelled to seek a home in this new world !

" Good heaven ! what sorrows gloomed that parting day
That called them from their native walks away ;
When the poor exiles, every pleasure past,
Hung round the bowers and fondly looked their last,
And took a long farewell, and wished in vain
For seats like these beyond the western main ;
And shuddering still to face the distant deep,
Returned and wept, and still returned to weep."

How often does the wish prevail in the bosom of the exile, after long years of successful toil, to return to the scenes of his youth, that he may enjoy a happiness that he never enjoyed in all the period of his expatriation, and at length resign life where he first drew its breath, and be buried in the sepulchre of his fathers ! These sentiments of local attachment are natural to the human heart ; it requires violence to eradicate them ; and when to all appearance they seem dead, it is not in general difficult to fan them anew into life. God, my fellow countrymen, has so formed us, that this natural sentiment is not easily destroyed, because he has implanted it in the soul for a beneficial and necessary purpose. It is the source of that deeper interest which we feel in our neighborhood and our country ; it prompts us, with the strong arm of patriotic love, to guard it from lawless invasion—we rally around our national banner, and contend *pro aris et focis* with emotions that rise in strength as danger threatens ; and when blessed with peace, this natural sentiment of regard for our country makes us rejoice in its prosperity and honor. We delight to see it surpass other lands in the career of improvement ; and one of our most fervent aspirations is, " O bless my country Heaven !" and make it truly great. These senti-

ments which nature inspires and which are sanctioned by the purest dictates of religion, are implanted and approved by God, as the means of exciting and concentrating our energy for the improvement of our fellow creatures within a suitable sphere where it may be beneficially felt. Our influence cannot extend throughout the world ; although a few vain men have styled themselves "citizens of the world"—the sphere is too wide for intense affection and practical beneficence. But we can make our affection bear practically upon our own little neighborhood—combined with others we may perhaps make it bear even upon a province—nay, when God has endued any one with the requisite gifts, he may stand up before the gaze of an empire, as a sage, as a statesman, as a warrior, and the benefits of his genius and deeds may awaken gratitude and joy in its every cottage and its every palace. Thus the local attachments formed in early life give birth to the most elevated sentiments and the noblest virtues. In the most eminent men it becomes a *passion*, and under its dominion what enterprises pregnant with good to future ages hath not the patriot achieved !

It is not to be denied, however, that that this passion for one's country has, when not governed by wise and christian principles, been productive of very pernicious consequences, especially when allied with commanding talent and eminent rank. It has inspired the lust of conquest—as if the groans of the conquered and extended territory were capable of augmenting national happiness. It has often fostered in a people ignorant prejudices and vain boasting—as if the disparagement of other countries enhanced the merits of their own. It has sometimes led one nation to adopt restrictive laws, which, while they were little profitable to itself, were injurious to

neighboring states. But because love of country has been thus misdirected, let us not forget that it is entitled to an eminent place among the incitements of virtue. Imagine not that it must necessarily be associated with a dislike of other countries. This would indeed be a melancholy perversion of the sentiment. What !—can I not love my own child with all that is tender and holy in parental regard, and yet love the child, of my neighbor too? Can I not toil and labor for the interests of my own family, with a diligence that never wearies, and at the same time be free from envy—nay rejoice in the prosperity of my neighbor? And can I not hear my country's name resounded in the plaudits of contiguous empires without wishing that these empires may be crushed that she may rise higher upon their ruins?—Far away be the barbarous and unchristian thought! For as my family will prosper best when the families around are prospering, so will my country prosper best when the countries around are prospering. The bounty of indulgent Heaven is enough for all; and the prayer that I offer to the King of kings for “my own, my native land,” must not be accompanied with one feeling of envy, or one imprecation of judgment on any part of his wide dominions.

Although local attachment, or love to country is a strong natural affection implanted by God for beneficial ends, and is distinctly sanctioned by the genius of christianity, we sometimes meet with persons in whom this natural affection is nearly extinct. Beware, I intreat you, of drawing the conclusion from such instances, that the affection is artificial, not natural! Do we not occasionally meet with persons in whom the strongest natural affections are nearly, or perhaps

altogether eradicated? Have we not heard of fathers who had ceased to love or care for their family?—of mothers who felt no compassion for the infant they bore?—of children who poured contempt on their parents?—of husband and wife who cherished towards each other a mutually embittered hate?—persons in whom the well-spring of parental, and filial and conjugal love had been dried up, as brooks with the drought of summer! And is it to be deemed strange—contrary to what we observe in respect to other natural affections—that love to our countrymen and our country should sometimes in like manner be destroyed? Oh no! the fact is melancholy, but not strange; for the affection with which we regard our country may unhappily be extinguished, as well as the affection with which we regard a parent. If a child permits himself habitually to look only at the defects of his father's character—only at the instances of severity he has shown—if week after week these are magnified in his eye, and made the subject of invidious comparisons and insulting language—if he accustom himself to go round the neighborhood loquaciously holding up to censure his father's failings and vices—say would it be strange that filial reverence and love should be destroyed in the bosom of such a son? Would not even a natural affection, although implanted by God and commanded by God, utterly perish from the heart by such means? And may the same not happen in regard to our love of country? If we look only at what is unfavorable in its physical aspect, on its barren heaths, on its rocky and snow-clad hills, on its unequal and ungenial climate, on its long and dreary winters—would it be strange that the local attachment should be diminished or destroyed? Or, if turning to its political institutions, we should regard only the friction and

jarring of their imperfect machinery ; if week after week we should fix our attention only on what is faulty in its legislation, or defective in the frame work of its constitution, or corrupt and selfish in the conduct of its rulers ; and if these should be the subject of a constant newspaper reading, and the theme of endless talk in the family, and of exciting harangues when we assemble with village groups, in which mind imparts to mind a more embittered dissatisfaction—tell me, would it be at all wonderful that those who act in this way should destroy within their hearts all love to country ; should be ready at any hazard to attempt its subversion ; or if hopelessness or fear should prevent their attempts at insurrection, that they should go out exiles to other lands, soured and discontented with, or even detesting, the land of their birth ? And tell me, even admitting that such persons were correct in some of their judgments, would this blight of disaffection that hath come over their heart, withering some of its best sentiments—would this render them more amiable, more happy, more virtuous beings, as they left the homes of their fathers in pursuit of utopian excellence on foreign shores ? Ah me ! it is impossible, for if our earliest and dearest local attachments are thus rudely uprooted from the heart in despite of nature and the command of God, it will always, wherever be the place of its sojourn, feel the unsettledness of a stranger and a wanderer as soon as new scenes are bereft of the charms of novelty, and new political institutions have disclosed those imperfections which are inseparable from all that man has framed, and all that man administers.

You will not conclude, my fellow countrymen, from any thing that I have now said, that the love which an enlightened and christian citizen bears towards his country should render

him blind to its faults, or careless of its reformation. Nay, he may search them out with the most laborious investigation; he may labour to obtain their removal by the most strenuous efforts; if he have devoted himself to public life, his whole heart and soul may be absorbed in this work; and in defiance of obloquy and opposition he may consume himself in the toils and struggles of patriotic virtue. Such a course the illustrious Wilberforce pursued. He saw that his country **was** involved in the guilt of trading in human beings; the groans of innumerable captives reached him from innumerable slave-ships; the crack of the slave driver's whip as it fell on its writhing victims was carried over the waves to his ear; his hand was stretched out to receive every record of the slave's miseries; and year after year did he rise up in the senate of his country, and thunder his denunciations against this detestable traffic carried on in the British dominions, under the sanction of law. Undismayed by the opposition of those in power, unseduced by the sophistries of those who pocketed the unholy gains, he persevered in his career of philanthropy. Long frustrated, he never fainted; and age had whitened on his head, and infirmities had wasted his strength, while exposing amidst continued disappointments the iniquity of his country. But did he cease to love that country? Did his abhorrence of that enormous crime, at which Britain long connived, render him incapable of exclaiming, "Britain, with all thy faults I love thee still?" Far from it; for though he knew the errors and sins of his country, he had studied well her excellencies too; and these had impressed him with so **deep** an admiration that he could give no slumber to his eyelids until he had wiped away the spots on his country's name. ~~Imagine not, christian~~ citizens, that love of country can ever

render its possessor indifferent to its improvement ; will ever make us connive at wickedness, however high the power be that commits it. Love always desires the perfection and happiness of its object. —

It cannot be denied that the affection of which we now speak has passed, during the last few years, as severe an ordeal in Canada, as ever it passed through, perhaps, in any land.—The causes which tend to its destruction have here operated almost unrestrained. Political controversy and factious strife have long raged throughout the province with unusual acrimony. Partizans on either side have not generally been guided by nice rules in the conduct of their warfare.—We say nothing whatever at present on the merits of the questions agitated. My design is rather to show that the manner in which they have been agitated has had a great tendency to destroy that love of country which is essential to popular contentment. With what persevering industry, for example, have particular subjects of complaint been kept before the public eye ! How insidiously have they been magnified ! The most active portion of the daily press was constantly employed in their dissemination. In many populous townships nothing was circulated but newspapers of the most pernicious description—vehicles of groundless censure and disaffection ; and recent events may lead us to infer that not a few have been led into the belief, that the whole of the administration of our public affairs was so incurably corrupted that nothing but the entire subversion of the whole frame-work of our constitution, could bring a remedy ! Hearing nothing, reading nothing, talking nothing, save what went to criminate the officers of the state, and to expose the rottenness of its whole machinery—overlooking every thing in their lot which

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calm and sober minds would approve and be thankful for, can we be surprised that they were wrought up to the frenzy of revolution, and that conflagration, and massacre and robbery, were deemed very trivial sacrifices for its accomplishment ! This state of mind was the necessary result of the means employed to produce it ; nor is there a government under heaven that might not be subverted by an effective use of the same means. Let its public writers tell only of its faults—let its public speakers always declaim on these—let the luxury and avarice of its officers be colored, exaggerated, held up incessantly as objects of popular reprobation—and such arts applied for a few years, without any correctives, would array opinion and physical force against any government, even the most perfect that the human imagination can conceive. We must surely, therefore, deem it the heaviest public calamity when those who are capable of directing public opinion, direct it into a wrong channel ; when they fan the embers of discontent—so natural to the human heart ; when they labor to involve law, and property, and personal safety in one common ruin. Alas ! there have been those among us, capable of better things, who have implicated themselves in this heavy guilt ; and had not God graciously interposed, the misguided—along with us who lamented their error—might have painfully suffered by the consequences.

May I not take occasion from these remarks to remind you that a true and enlightened regard to our country should manifest itself very much in the same way as we manifest regard for a friend. No man loves to hear the faults of his friend often and maliciously referred to ; no one can patiently bear his friend's character misrepresented or set forth only on

the dark side. Granting that he has his faults, why should they always be held up to view while his excellencies are all concealed? Is not this manifest injustice, and would we not be guilty of conniving at it by listening to it in silence? But it is an equal injustice to our country, and equally inconsistent with the love we owe it, to listen with patience or favor to such factious and evil designing men as speak of nothing but its faults; who are never warmed into pathos with any thing but some instance of mal-administration, and that for no other purpose but, by fomenting discontent, to make us the tools of their ambition! Alas, there are not a few who yield to such men, and are gratified with their conduct. Deluded by their glozing lies, they are now disposed to treat the government of their country, not as a friend set to promote their well-being, but as an enemy, whose every motion is to be jealously watched! Let it be acknowledged that it is the duty of the citizens of every free state, if they would preserve the inheritance of their freedom, carefully to watch the conduct of those to whom they have entrusted the management of public affairs; yet surely it ought not to be with the suspicion and jealousy with which we regard an enemy, but with the confidence and affection with which we regard a friend.— While we reserve to ourselves the privilege of condemning what is wrong, let us cheerfully yield our confidence in doubtful and difficult measures, and our approbation for the faithful services which the officers of the state may have rendered it. This conduct is manifestly just; no christian can recede from it. Had those who have renounced their allegiance to their country acted on such principles, they had saved themselves from disgrace and ruin, and the government from a shock which has made it totter to its very base.

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Animated, as I trust we all are, with the desire of being guided by such principles, we shall be disposed, on this day of thanksgiving, gratefully to acknowledge the providence of God in those events which have favored the preservation of order and constitutional government among us. It is not possible for us, believing as we do, in the declaration of the psalmist, "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain," to overlook those very remarkable events by which the hand of the Lord hath wrought out our deliverance from all the horrors of rebellion and civil war.— Can we doubt that He smote to the earth the fierce and blaspheming * leader of the rebel band, and spread indecision and fear throughout their ranks? Can we doubt that he paralyzed all their subsequent opposition, and scattered them as chaff before the wind? By what power hath the breath of winter been rendered mild as the morning of autumn, so that our lake has not been sealed up with ice, nor intercourse between distant places impeded? Have we not reason to see the hand of God in the harmonious assembling of the loyal and

* We have it on the authority of an eye-witness, that the rebel leader, whose name we have no wish to perpetuate, met his death a moment after his utterance of a volley of profane oaths. A gentleman of Toronto, who had been taken prisoner on Yonge Street by the above leader, discharged his pistol at him, while in the act of making his escape. The shot missed the object at which it was aimed; but his horse being frightened, the rider, a corpulent man, lost his balance, fell to the ground, and broke his neck. This singular event disconcerted the plans of the insurgents, and prevented the attack from being made on Toronto on Monday evening, when the diabolical design could scarcely have failed, as the inhabitants of the city were wholly unprepared to resist the assailants. On the following day the city was prepared. Thus, by the gracious interposition of God, were conflagration, massacre, and rapine averted from the metropolis.

well affected throughout every part of the province for the preservation of life and property, and constitutional authority ? And are we too sanguine in our interpretation of the ways of God in these recent events, when we hope that the storm hath purified our political atmosphere, and that hereafter we shall enjoy a freedom, at least from intestine political strife, which for some years we have not known. Would to God that the experience of the last few weeks, presenting as they have done a near prospect of civil convulsion with its alarms and dangers, may lead every inhabitant of this colony to maintain the laws as the guardian of right, and the constitution as the ark of our security and the bulwark of our freedom. Then will our thankfulness to God manifest itself in appropriate fruits.

Recognising God in his providence as the averter of these calamities, the bestower of these benefits, I ought not to conclude these remarks without making some allusion to the laws by which this providence is conducted, in reference to the well-being of nations—that these may serve as a guide to that love of country which, I trust, we all feel. Let it not be forgotten, then, that if we would wisely hope that God shall keep our city—shall preserve our country—it must be our care by every right means to propitiate the divine favor. Oh, what title can an ungodly and profligate people have to trust in the protection of God ?—Is it not with nations, as it is with individuals, evil shall be to them that do evil ?—If throughout our land there shall continue to prevail that reckless indifference to the word and the ordinances of *Christ's gospel* which so unhappily mark our provincial population ;—if the religious education of the young shall *continue to be neglected* as it has been ; if Sabbath desecration, if intemperance, if the low

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and besotted pursuit of temporal things, if the contempt of intellectual pursuits shall continue to characterise our people;—how can we hope that we shall be a people blessed of God? God has taught us in his word, and in all the history of the past, that national greatness cannot be attained apart from national virtue; that freedom can never be long enjoyed by a people devoid of intelligence; that sin is the curse and reproach of any people, and by righteousness alone can a nation be exalted. Thus taught, have we not reason to dread the heavy judgments of God, when we consider what as a people we are—and may we not tremble lest the evils which have lately befallen us should only be the beginning of sorrows!

In the humble sphere allotted to us in the dispensation of God—we may have but little in our power to promote our country's well-being. Our voice, our influence, is confined within a very narrow circle;—but we discharge the duties we owe to God and our country if we make that influence felt for good within our own sphere narrow though it be. By the grace of God, each of us may REFORM HIMSELF; by care we may rectify our own opinions and amend our own life. Our example may be a guiding light within the circle of our friendship; we may educate our children to be consistent christians and useful subjects;—combined with a few kindred spirits, we may be the means of preserving our own vicinage from him who goeth about to devour;—and were the numerous hamlets throughout the land to become as so many centres of a reforming influence, wisdom and the fear of God would yet become our glory as a people. Abundant reason have we to thank God for our connection with an empire whose history, reaching from very remote ages, is as bright as aught pre-

sented to us in the annals of nations ; whose present position is most honorably conspicuous among the kingdoms of the world. We are the subjects of a monarch whose only wish is our prosperity and happiness—and who wields a power capable of promoting them, so far as mere human power can promote them. Our Queen's Councillors can have no wish but that our own dependence on the present state may be for the advantage of her colonial subjects. We have received a constitution conferring almost an excess of liberty on the governed ; and if in these circumstances aught of evil should remain, the remedy rests with ourselves. And we doubt not that this remedy will be applied. But let it be applied—my fellow subjects—under the influence of that love of country of which we have now spoken, and in the fear of the King of kings, to whom high and low among us are equally accountable. We shall thus always be saved from the wicked designs of ambitious and discontented men, and our path in the ascent of empire—may be worthy of the lineage from which it is our boast, that we have sprung.

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